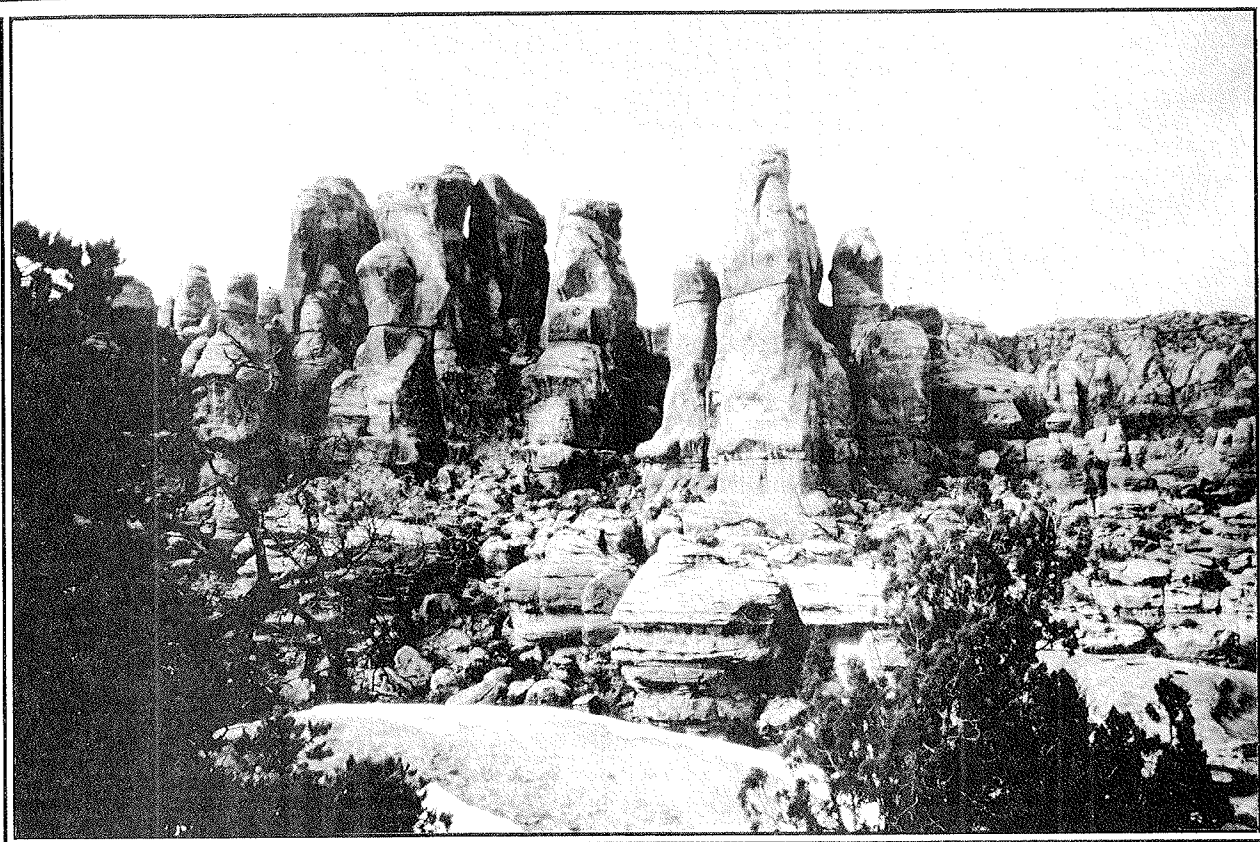


# South Needles WSA



# SOUTH NEEDLES WSA

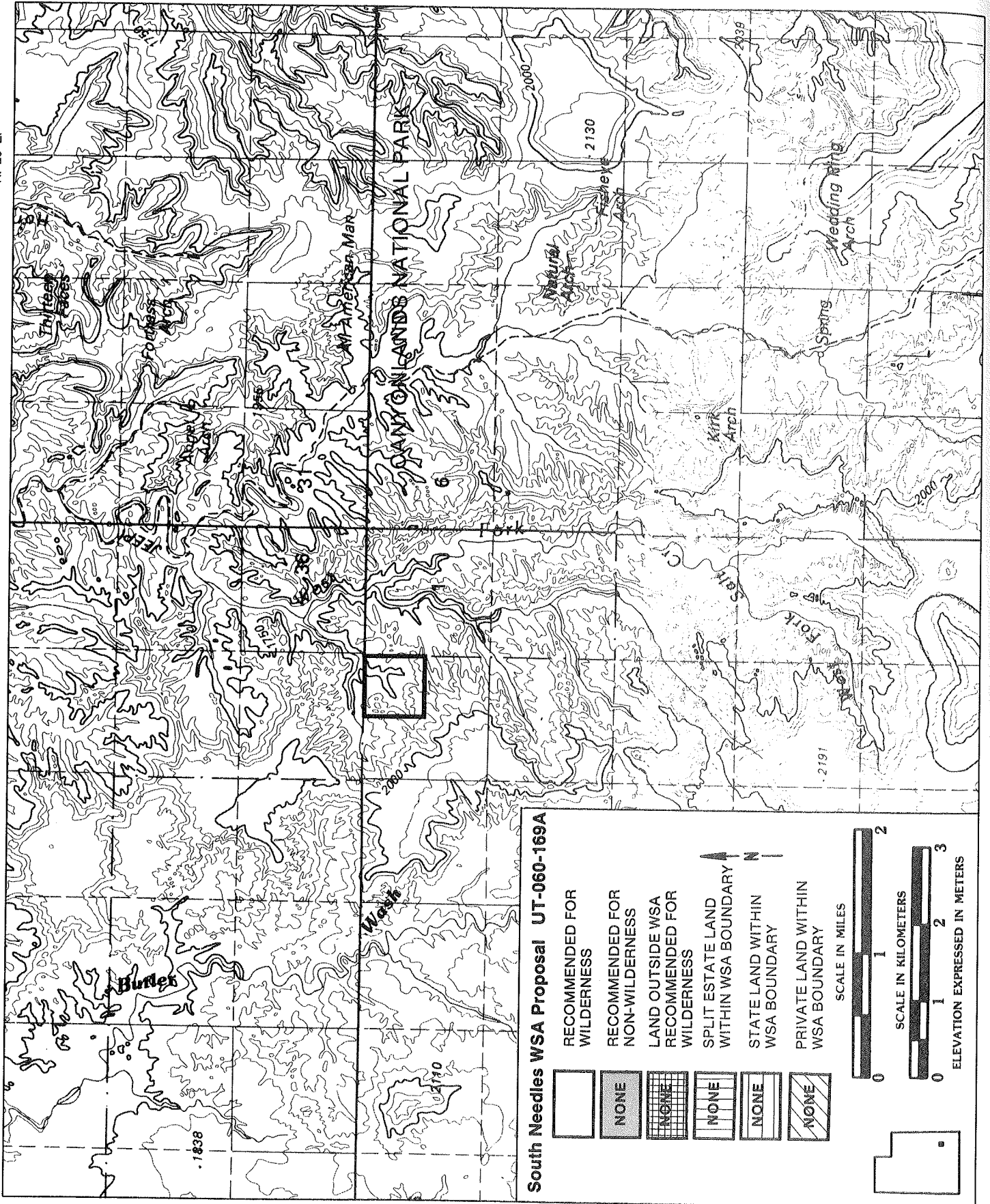
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October 1991



## South Needles WSA Proposal UT-060-169A

RECOMMENDED FOR  
WILDERNESS

RECOMMENDED FOR  
NON-WILDERNESS

LAND OUTSIDE WSA  
RECOMMENDED FOR  
WILDERNESS

SPLIT ESTATE LAND  
WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY

STATE LAND WITHIN  
WSA BOUNDARY

PRIVATE LAND WITHIN  
WSA BOUNDARY

SCALE IN MILES

SCALE IN KILOMETERS

ELEVATION EXPRESSED IN METERS

# SOUTH NEEDLES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

## 1. THE STUDY AREA: 160 acres

The South Needles Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-060-169A) is in northwestern San Juan County, about 10 air miles northwest of Monticello, Utah (population 1,929). The WSA is a small parcel, extending about a 0.5 mile on each side, contiguous on two sides with Canyonlands National Park and on the other two sides with 480 acres of State land which separates the WSA from the Butler Wash WSA (UT-060-169) (see Map). The WSA contains 160 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). There are no private, State, or split-estate land in-holdings in the WSA (see Table 1).

The terrain consists of sloping slick-rock that drains northeastward and low benches.

Elevations range from 5,640 feet in the northeast, where the drainages flow into Canyonlands National Park, to 6,240 feet at the southwest corner. Pinyon-juniper woodland grows on the benches.

At the time of BLM's wilderness inventory, this parcel was believed to be State land and it was not included in the Draft Utah BLM State Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The parcel was formally designated as a WSA through a Federal Register Notice dated January 21, 1986. This is in accord with the general planning provisions of Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

The analysis of the WSA was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness EIS finalized in November 1990.

TABLE 1  
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	160
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0
Total	160
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	160
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	160
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	0
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

## SOUTH NEEDLES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and a no action (no wilderness) alternative.

Subsequent to publication of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS, the Utah State Director approved the San Juan Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP). The plan includes all of the South Needles WSA in the Butler Wash Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to protect scenic values. Special management requirements now in effect within the ACEC, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: closure to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use; stipulations to prevent surface occupancy on oil and gas leases (Category 3); requirement for an approved plan of operations with special conditions to limit surface use for mining related activity; closed to disposal of mineral materials; exclusion from private and commercial use of woodland products, except for limited on-site collection of dead wood for campfires; management to limit recreation use if scenic values are being damaged; management to meet Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I objectives.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

160 acres

(recommended for wilderness)

0 acres

(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate the entire area as wilderness. This is the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term.

All of the WSA is in a natural condition and provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. No conflicts exist with minerals or other uses. Wilderness designation would complement the proposed Needles Wilderness area in the adjacent Canyonlands National Park.

The WSA is in the Butler Wash ACEC where restrictions on OHV use, mineral and energy exploration and development, mineral material disposal, and harvest of woodland products would continue to be

administratively applied if the area is released from wilderness consideration and protection of wilderness characteristics is not a management objective.

The WSA is not a viable independent candidate for wilderness designation if Congress does not designate the contiguous National Park Service (NPS) proposed wilderness area in Canyonlands National Park. If managed as part of the contiguous NPS unit, the WSA would be part of a viable wilderness area.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

#### Wilderness Characteristics

##### A. Naturalness

The WSA is in a natural condition with no known intrusions. Several miles of nonmotorized travel are required to reach the unit. No surface-disturbing activities have occurred since the wilderness inventory.

##### B. Solitude

The entire WSA provides outstanding opportunities for solitude. The unit is rugged terrain with pinyon pine, juniper trees, and oak vegetation providing screening for users. The WSA is nearly surrounded by 85,000 acres of land being considered for wilderness designation.

##### C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The entire WSA offers outstanding opportunities for hiking and backpacking in conjunction with Canyonlands National Park. Other existing and potential uses include hunting, sightseeing, and nature and archaeological study. These opportunities together contribute to diverse, high quality recreational experiences.

##### D. Special Features

The unit is very scenic. Red and buff spires, knobs, and buttes contrast with green vegetation and blue sky. The highly eroded sandstone features, including numerous pinnacles and the Vanhemert Arch, provide for geologic study and viewing. The entire WSA is rated outstanding for scenic quality.

## SOUTH NEEDLES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Two archaeological sites were noted during field work and the potential for finding additional sites is high. A spring on the northern edge of the WSA flows about 0.5 cubic feet per second and supports a small riparian area of cottonwoods, oak, and reeds.

Cougar, which is a wildlife species associated with wilderness, may be found in the WSA. Peregrine falcons, which are listed as an endangered species, may use the study area. The golden eagle, a species considered by the BLM to be sensitive, is found in the WSA. Six other special status animal species and one plant species that are considered sensitive also may occur in the WSA.

Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

### Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

#### A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS. PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion.

The PNV in the WSA is entirely juniper-pinyon woodland (160 acres). This particular PNV is well represented in the NWPS nationally and in Utah and in other BLM study areas both in and outside of Utah. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

#### B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

#### C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The South Needles WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 117 areas comprising 6,988,052 acres in Utah, Arizona, and Colorado, the adjacent states nearest the WSA.

A South Needles Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau, however, where there are just two established wilderness areas, totaling 70,751 acres. There are three designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. About 12 miles south of the WSA is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (U.S.

TABLE 2  
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,143,845
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,706,038

Source: BLM File Data.

## **SOUTH NEEDLES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

Forest Service [FS]); to the east, in Colorado, is the 41,189-acre Lizard Head Wilderness (FS); and to the west is the 25,751-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The WSA is completely surrounded by State land and Canyonlands National Park and is too small to be effectively managed as designated wilderness. If Congress designates the proposed Needles Wilderness in Canyonlands National Park, the WSA would be a viable part of the NPS wilderness area.

There are no existing oil and gas leases or mining claims in the WSA. No development is expected in the foreseeable future if the area is designated wilderness. No disturbance from ORV activity is anticipated due to the rugged terrain and inaccessibility of the area to vehicles.

### Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) prepared a mineral assessment report for the South Needles WSA (USGS Informal Report dated October 23, 1989).

The report indicates that the study area has moderate potential for oil and gas. The report also indicates that the study area has low mineral resource potential for all metals, including uranium, vanadium, copper, gold, silver, potash and halite, coal, and geothermal energy. No mineral resources were identified except for inferred subeconomic resources of sandstone. Because of the abundance of sandstone in the region, the distance from markets, and the lack of unique properties, there is no current likelihood of development.

### Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects on wilderness values which is considered to be the only pertinent resource that would be significantly affected by designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

### Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

### Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation for the adjacent Butler Wash WSA were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the South Needles WSA.

Because the South Needles WSA was not analyzed in the Draft EIS, no formal public input specifically addressing this WSA was received.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

# SOUTH NEEDLES WSA

Table 3  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternatives<sup>a</sup>

Issue Topic	Alternatives	
	Recommendation All Wilderness (160 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness designation would preserve the wilderness values in the WSA. This alternative would complement and enhance wilderness values, uses, and management of the contiguous portion of Canyonlands National Park.	Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation. No disturbance that would affect wilderness values is anticipated in the foreseeable future. This alternative would, however, not complement and enhance wilderness values, uses, and management of the contiguous portion of Canyonlands National Park.